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of the California Library Association three or four years ago I said: "In general, it seems to me that interlibrary loans on the east side of the bay (meaning San Francisco Bay), and possibly all around the bay, are not necessary." I was speaking at that time from the university library point of view, but I think I can still subscribe to that statement.

Another interesting but perplexing problem confronting the public library is to try to determine how far to avoid the purchase of books because they happen to be in the college library. The standards of purchase of a public library in a town where there is a strong college or university library will vary considerably from those of a public library which stands alone in its community. There are a good many books, mostly scholarly and expensive, which the

public library in a college town would hardly be justified in buying as long as copies are accessible at the college library.

One more way in which the college can help the public library is in reference work. Of course, there will be many instances in which the college library, with its large collection, will be better equipped to answer reference questions than the smaller collection of the public library, but readers should be referred to the college library only when the public library has failed after careful effort to meet their needs, and when the questions they are looking up are of some real importance.

The guiding principle in solving these problems should take the middle ground of friendly co-operation rather than the extreme either of too much independence on the one hand, or of too much dependence on the other.

INSPIRATIONAL INFLUENCE OF BOOKS IN THE LIFE OF CHILDREN

BY MRS. EDNA LYMAN SCOTT, *Lecturer on Story-Telling, Seattle*

In the midst of problems and conflicting responsibilities it is not surprising that one often hears a sigh for the "Golden Age of Childhood"—for the time when there are no cares, when all is freedom, fun and frolic.

But as we look about us at the children of today, would any of us truly wish to be a modern child if he could? You gasp! Is not this the era of the child? Is it not the time, above all others, when the first consideration is for him, when his needs are met before he realizes them, when his desires have only to be expressed to find gratification? Is he not the center about which modern society moves? Are not laws made for him, moneys appropriated to be devoted to his service, lands set aside for his use? Are not the most scholarly studying him, the most alert observing him, the most carefully trained ministering to him? Has he not come to have even a commercial value to the state, so that he is protected and cared for as an

asset? Certainly all these conditions are true or partially true, but who would exchange his own childhood for that of a child of today?

Did we not have more leisure, did not imagination thrive better unobserved, were we not more resourceful, since the resources of adults were not ours to command? Would we change the companionship of the most interesting of mothers for that of any kindergartener, or the firm, even justice of the father who had learned his lessons of obedience before he exacted them, for the discipline of any school?

We jumped from the wood-pile because a ship was burning, and swung from the rafters of the barn because an invisible audience was ready to applaud the wonderful performance of the "World's Greatest Lady Gymnast." What would we have thought of directed play?"

Sometimes we made bold to venture to the public library—it was not nearly so enticing as a certain book-case at home

filled with a very miscellaneous collection of volumes. We pulled them down one after another until the one was found; we returned again and again, and though we were sure we had looked at every one, we wondered why it was that the green book we never had cared to read before, now looked so very entertaining? What would we have thought of graded lists? We did not need them;—these books found their way into our consciousness to inspire and uplift, apparently without effort on anyone's part. How did it happen?

What is it that enables a book to be inspirational to anyone? Is it not when he comes upon the thought of the author unhampered by a preconceived notion of it, unprejudiced by what someone else thinks of it, and uninfluenced by the sense of what he ought to think about it? If a book speaks straight to the heart, or to the head, firing the enthusiasm, or stimulating the thought, is not that inspirational influence? And to how many children of this day have books thus spoken? Is it because they lack the atmosphere of freedom in making the acquaintance, which alone makes inspiration possible, or is it because the children's book of today does not suggest thought? A teacher of literature once told me it was her custom to ask her students about the books they had read as children, and she found that never more than two or three in a large class expressed any enthusiasm; many could not remember anything about the books they had read. Experiments in library schools furnish almost identical results. To comparatively few do the years of childhood seem to have been in the least vital,—they leave no clear impressions of what they felt or thought about people and things,—no experiences stand out as significant—and the book-life, if there was any, has left but a blur.

Once, long ago, an old house stood beneath the sheltering branches of huge oaks and slender elms. Within its walls, a simple family history lived itself into reality, found its way into the world, and returned

again to rekindle its fires at the hearth where they had first been lighted.

Activity characterized the life of the house, from the business interests of the tall soldier father and the many-sided talents of the mother who administered the affairs of the household and was its poet and seer of visions also, down to the youngest of its children, who arose in the morning with the question, "What shall we do now?"

It was not, however, the activity which made the atmosphere significant. It was not that which gave it vitality and immortality in the lives of those who came in touch with it. It was, rather, that they felt the cultural things came first, the things of the spirit were esteemed the real things; that books containing life-giving ideals and lasting thoughts were among the assets of the home to be most prized and made most one's own. That high ideals and great thoughts had already enriched the lives of those of maturer years, made them interpreters of value, and the children, whoever they might be, unconsciously felt that here were people who knew books, not as superficial acquaintances, but as friends, tried and valued.

When the lights began to spring into being through the village, an atmosphere of expectancy was evident in the old-fashioned living-room, as of good things to come, and the final household duties were completed with haste, that the hour of reading before bed-time might be made as long as possible. It was an hour all shared, and the interest of the reading was enhanced by the gentle voice of the reader. There were times when the tale seemed a trifle beyond the grasp of some—there *must* have been times when it took the heart of childhood to find absorbing interest in the very simple stories.

But the memories of those experiences, themselves like books, one and all recite their stories, some more vividly, some less so.

Many of these book friends are now reported "out of print" and have been for years;—some of them were the old friends

of the Mother. "Scottish chiefs" had fired the boyhood enthusiasm of the Father. But they can never be quite "out of print" while battered copies stand on the shelf to be taken down and read to those who follow after.

There never has been in all the multitude of animal books published one which deserved to be a greater favorite than "The life of a bear." It was when these children of the house were wee folk, they followed step by step the delightful adventures of Martin from his babyhood in the mountain-cave, his lessons in woodcraft and worldly wisdom, to his coming of age, his ventures into the vineyards and among the cattle, and at last his capture. There was such pleasure in knowing a family of wild creatures so intimately, even if the sympathy with Martin was a little too keen when he played the role of dancing bear, finished his days in the zoo, and achieved immortality in the museum. If the book was intended to give any information, it certainly did not burden any with passages to be skipped, but left a delightful feeling with all that they would like to know more, not only about bears, but about other folk, commonly spoken of as "wild beasts," who live in strange places. Whether it was the *expression* of such an interest, I do not know, but "Little folks in feathers and fur" was the companion chosen for a visit made about this time to the grandmother's farm. Scientists have pronounced this book hopelessly unsound—but why listen to their ranting, since they will not write?

Someone has said that children care for the books that touch their own lives directly in some fashion or other,—fairy tales appealing to the child who is constantly making excursions into imaginary realms, realistic stories to the child who is limited by his inability to "make believe" and cares only to see himself mirrored with slight variations in what he reads. Perhaps the unusual children combine the two in their more catholic tastes, and revel not only in imaginative literature, but in touches of realism as well.

"The story of Dollikins" was a small oblong book bound in red, and it came from England, which accounted, we believe, for the unfamiliar scenes and costumes in the illustrations. But oh what joy to hear of the adventures of a doll who was ill and went to the seashore—whose wardrobe was more elegant than the ladies in real life, and who was made to do so many things it was possible to imitate. Was that the charm, too, of the "Lucy books" that had belonged to the Mother? Or was it that she had been inspired by them to learn her letters by pricking all the o's with a wax-headed pin, as Lucy did, and had actually seen an apple cooking as it twirled on a string before the fire?

It was not alone to the children of the home that the book world was opened. Each week a "wriggling, furniture-scratching mob of boys," as one of them recently expressed it, appeared for a chapter from "The boys of '61," Dickens' "Child's history of England," "Page, squire and knight," "The little duke," Knox's "Boy travelers," and other favorites. That these hours were full of inspiration was evidenced by the persistent attendance at the time, and not less by the worn volumes which have been read and re-read to other boys in their turn. From every corner of the country grown men have stopped at the old house as they journeyed on affairs of business, to say "We have not forgotten those old days, when you used to read to us. How did you ever stick it out with such a noisy bunch?"

I have sometimes wondered why I never take up an "Arabian nights" without feeling a consciousness of heat, and summer days, and light sifting through closed green blinds? Perhaps it is not so strange, since the surroundings, however incidental, have a way of reproducing themselves as the backgrounds of our memories.

In the old living-room, near the fireplace, there was a walnut table with spindle legs and shelves which held books tightly arranged in rows. They were most of them "grown-up" books—"Pilgrims' progress"

lay on the top. It had an embossed cover and conventional flowered borders in blue or pink, and on Sunday afternoons this great book was taken down and could be read when other books about giants and ogres were forbidden. What the difference was I never knew—but was subconsciously grateful that there was a difference.

On the first shelf, next three small blue volumes of Tennyson, stood the faded and dingy, and "fat" "Arabian nights" close fellow to "Baron Munchausen," with the picture of the horse with the stream of water flowing through his severed body. This edition of "Arabian nights" must have been nearly complete, the print was very fine, and the few colored illustrations crude; but through an entire summer of long, hot days, it furnished constant and unceasing entertainment and delight to the girl friends who haunted the old house. Heat and discomfort were forgotten as scenes of magic filled the hours, and genii, enchanted princes, beautiful princesses, caves filled with gold and jewels held the listeners spell-bound with their charms. "Tales of a caravan inn and palace" was almost as engaging and possessed the added fascination of making us "shiver"—like the Doré illustrations in the "Ancient mariner."

"Little men" was a perfect find. It had the advantage, too, of being somewhat of a surprise, for, by some binder's slip, it stood in a cover labeled "Old-fashioned girl." One day, when everything had failed to interest, and every book had been read at "least a thousand times," we stumbled on it and began to read. It was a perfect revelation—for such a life was undreamed of even, and we read every chapter with cumulative enjoyment. I shall never forget the sensations that were mine as I listened to the chapter called "Patty-Pans" which recounted the installation of a tiny kitchen as part of the playroom, where the children cooked real dinners, and had all manner of fun. We sat on the porch floor with our backs against the great front door—I remember because everyone had to

walk around us to get in. One read, then another; we could not wait for breath to proceed, and we could not bear to finish.

Who does not remember his first poetry? Certainly he could never forget it, if it had been read to him by a poet and looking back through the years the voice with its music and soft cadences sounds again, he sees the light in the eyes, that look which he only half understood, he can almost feel his hand stealing again to his throat (he did not know why it felt so strange), and he realizes it is to the reader of his first poems that he owes his love of the greatest of all literature. Perhaps there are those who never experienced a break in their love of verse, but many children drop poetry with their fairy tales, and nothing ever seems to revive their interest in it. It was during the dark ages when poetry was a thing abhorred, that I sat on the floor under an old-fashioned grand piano, where the reading aloud of poetry had driven me to other amusements. Disappointment at being thus self-banished left an ear half conscious of what went on,—and suddenly into that consciousness came the lines.

"Alone, but with unbated zeal,
That horseman plied the scourge and steel;
For jaded now, and spent with toil,
Emboss'd with foam, and dark with soil,
While every gasp with sobs he drew,
The laboring stag strain'd full in view.
Two dogs of black Saint Hubert's breed,
Unmatched for courage, breath and speed,
Fast on his flying traces came,
And all but won that desperate game,
For, scarce a spear's length from his
 haunch,
Vindictive toil'd the bloodhounds staunch;
Nor nearer might the dogs attain,
Nor farther might the quarry strain.

"The hunter mark'd that mountain high,
The lone lake's western boundary,
And deem'd the stag must turn to bay,
Where that huge rampart barr'd the way;
Already glorying in the prize
Measur'd his antlers with his eyes."

It was a story! Then even that despised poetry might be endured, since, by patient listening such adventures could be enjoyed. Never again after "The lady of the lake"

was persuasion to read poetry necessary. "The lay of the last minstrel," "Evangeline" with its long swinging lines, and "Miles Standish" were the next friends: after that I do not remember how they came, until, passing from childhood to youth, Shelley's "Skylark" and "Wild west wind" solaced, and Byron was read, under protest, from cover to cover.

One day there was a birthday, and a whole row of books stood waiting for their places to be found. They were all bound alike, and all written by the same man, Sir Walter Scott by name, and they had titles which had no meaning at all. It was in the days before novels were "required reading" in the schools, that the Mother skipped the introduction and began the story of *Ivanhoe*. Dry, uninteresting, hard to read? Well perhaps,—but none of the children would have pronounced them hard to *listen* to. Here was a world unknown, a world that really had been, yet was as wonderful as the world of fairy princes. If tasks at school palled, playmates grew uninteresting, and there was "nothing to do," each brown book was an invitation to lose identity and become a Leicester, a Quentin Durward, or Richard-the-lion-heart. For the first time history was worth-while, simply because it touched these heroes, even though the connection may have been very slight.

If Mark Twain has been read again and again because he alone knew how to be funny, he certainly has not been less loved just for the simple art of story-telling. That the "Prince and the pauper" "might have been true even if it wasn't true" was not needed as a justification in the preface, because you knew it must have been true; it could not sound that way if it wasn't true; it *was* true. You loved the Prince for his bravery, his sufferings, his fair treatment and gentle courtesy when sorest tried, you loved every description of courtly procedure and lavish display; you gloried in the growing courtliness of the little pauper; in his quick adaptability and his resourcefulness in difficult situations you felt his princely character, and almost

wept that he must lose his throne to keep his heritage of honor. Such was the hold of this book that it was for years a resort in time of depression or convalescence from the numerous childish illnesses.

It is a wonderful thing to have written one real book that has brought joy to the heart of a child, real joy that lasts. Whether it is true, as we often hear, that every man has some one story he can tell successfully, it is certain that the single story for children which many a great author has allowed himself the pleasure of telling has a rare and enduring quality which few writers of children's books possess. It is difficult to analyze, but it touches children and grown people equally. One could never tell why we laughed at "The rose and the ring" or even at "Alice in Wonderland." But isn't it enough to know we slept better when we had heard them, and that we reveled in the nonsense like lambs in the green fields? How glad we are there were no psychologists to investigate the cause of our merriment, and none in authority to demand that we tell whether we understood the wonderful symbolic meaning in "At the back of the North Wind," or "The Princess and the goblin." They gave us something like the same feeling that came with some of the stories we heard from the Bible—we felt the great Power leading ever to the light, and we wished somehow, that we were better—though we could not have told why and we were not even sure it was anything in the stories that had made us feel so.

Surely there would come a protest from the very walls of the old rooms, they might of their own volition repeat the story of "Scrooge and Marley," if we forgot to give it place. For every Christmas, with the regularity of the stockings at the fire-place and the "little round-green-trees" in the window "The Christmas carol" was read. Like Tiny Tim's "God bless us every one," it shed the blessing of unselfishness like a soft light over the simple Christmas festivities.

And are you wondering what all this has to do with the "Inspirational influence of

books in the life of children"? *Why* do children voluntarily read books? Some merely to pass the time, some because they find satisfaction in the act of reading, but, do not the majority read because the book suggests further mental activity? They are natural imitators, and the book supplies the material for dramatization, or portrays characteristics which seem admirable and stimulate to efforts at reproduction.

Are there not many more "Sentimental Tommys" than we have been conscious of, or willingly admitted?

Children are always *being* somebody. Sometimes this imitative tendency takes the form of playing the story, sometimes of impersonating the individual who has seemed heroic and sometimes merely trying to imitate the admired qualities.

I know a young girl who says she remembers that she was always acting as she thought people in books would have acted. She sat perched for hours in a most uncomfortable position in an apple-tree reading, because the heroine of a book she had read made an impression by doing so. She was haughty or gracious, friendly or distant as the particular character she was impressed with at the time happened to be.

If a book influences and inspires such activity, it must be because it makes its impress with the clearness and vividness which come with the freedom and joy of spontaneous reading.

Inspiration is rarely bred of tasks imposed by authority, or of directed activity.

We have laughed Charles Lamb's "browsing" out of existence, and with the disappearance has gone the real opportunity to choose, to weigh and measure, which alone preserves originality, or stimulates the creative impulse, or gives the breath of inspiration to books. The sense of discovery is one of the chief elements of inspiration; but it is almost impossible to "discover" anything in the modern library, —some wise librarian has already "found" and recorded it, and ticketed it for the individual who needs it. The importance of bringing all the resources of the library

to the service of the public has become so deep a conviction that we may need to remind ourselves that we do harm rather than the desired good, when we deprive children of the stimulating effort of seeking to find for themselves, and formulating independent judgments.

If the public library is to take the place of the ideal home where the recorded thoughts of those great minds who have gone before is part of the background of its children, where the association with people who have always understood, valued and loved books creates an unconscious receptivity and longing for the world of thought, then must we not preserve in the library as nearly as possible the elements which such a home represents?

Training is to make the enthusiasm and love of books efficient, but back of the training there must be the person who really values books as his most treasured and familiar friends, who with all his learning has never grown away from his fondness for them as he was fond of them in childhood.

Compulsory companionship, something we have to read, whether in the school or the library will never be a source of inspiration.

To quote the deductions of a young person from meditations on "why you never liked the books you had to read in school," "You can't get inspiration by having books shoved at you. Inspiration doesn't come in batches,—it comes as it grows out of thinking about the books you have read. A difference of opinion with the teacher might spoil the teacher's whole plan for presenting her literature lesson, and make it impossible to point the moral she intended. Hence, quite unconsciously, any originality, any independent opinions, or unorthodox tastes were nipped in the bud."

The librarian may be just as guilty as the teacher of trying to impress her own tastes, standards, and appreciation on the public. It is not we who are to inspire but the books, so would it not be well if we had more faith in the power of thought to reach the consciousness longing for truth?

Only as the child can come to feel that they are his books, that he may read what he likes, pass by what does not attract, bring back a book half-read, like or dislike any or all, without even subconsciously suffering from a sense of disapproval or failure to meet the expectations of a librarian—only then will his book life be a joy and so an inspiration. Our claim for the work with children has been that it is educational—but educating a taste for literature does not necessarily mean standardizing taste. Absolute uniformity is not desirable, nor can we even say that exact conformity to our own opinion is the ideal.

How do we dare say this is the book the boy in the slums *needs*, or that this book will release the child of the complacent suburbs from his bondage to indifference and *ennui*, or that this story peoples with heroes the unimaginative life of the child of the country?

Long ago the great Socrates said "All my

good is magnetic, and I educate not by teaching, but by going about my daily business."

If we would rouse the latent love of nature, all we can do is to bring one where he may hear for himself,—

"What the sea has striven to say
So long, and yearned up the cliffs to tell."

Where are our memories, what have we done with the book-life of our childhood? Did we have no inspirations to color our lives that we have so little understanding of the vital necessities in our children's rooms?

Only one who has felt for himself the inspiration of books,—books of many kinds—who thrills still at the very names of his favorites, who knows the joy of finding a message for himself and so recognizes that the message he receives is not the only one, only such a one can ever place books where they may be an inspirational influence in the life of children.

READING OF OLDER BOYS AND GIRLS

By MRS. ALICE G. WHITBECK, *Librarian, Contra Costa County Free Library, Martinez, Calif.*

If one of those time-honored questionnaires could have been sent to all librarians who deal directly with the adolescent, asking what problems they would like discussed at this meeting, I do not doubt in the least but that a majority of the answers would voice the same thought but expressed in different ways, "How can we keep the boys and girls interested in good books?" "How can we reach the young girls?" "What shall we do with the young people whose books show a steady decline from the books they read in the children's room?"

When so many conditions enter into the work of each one of us, how can any all embracing answer be given? You ask, "What do the older boys and girls read?" We might answer shortly, "They read whatever they can get their hands on, many times books we wish they would

not," and theoretically, "They should read only the best." We realize our problem but are we able to present any solution that will fill all possible cases? Innumerable illuminating papers have been written on the subject; we have a number of very helpful books on the question of children's reading; we have lists compiled by well known authorities and yet we seem still to have the problem with us. All of us acknowledge the same aim, the same earnest desire to see the youth of our town read books that will give him not only the necessary pleasure and recreation but enrich his entire life and yet, I sometimes wonder whether we do not take this point too seriously and I ask you to hark back to your own adolescent days and confess—did *you* always read books that enriched your mind and that exerted lasting influence on your life? You certainly